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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 000716

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES
COORDINATOR PAVILIONIS

REF: VILNIUS 708

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Damian R. Leader for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In her first meeting with Zygimantis Pavilionis, the MFA's Coordinator for Lithuania's Presidency of the Community of Democracies (CD), Ambassador Derse heard that the current recalibration of Lithuania's foreign policy provided an opportunity for the United States, and that Lithuania was using its time at the helm of the CD to look critically at its own democratic development. Pavilionis also said that he feared Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas would fare poorly in his personality clash with President Dalia Grybauskaite, and promoted the idea of high-level meetings and visits to Lithuania by USG officials. End summary.

¶2. (C) Pavilionis, whose previous MFA positions have included deputy chief negotiator for EU accession, political director and undersecretary, told the Ambassador that debate about the direction of Lithuania's foreign policy began about two years before President Adamkus left office last summer. Until then, the focus had been on Lithuania's drive to join NATO and the EU and its integration into those organizations. "Now the rules have changed," Pavilionis said. "We're inside, and the question is who will have influence. The struggle is on. We've got a generation change in Lithuania." He said Lithuania's foreign policy was "balancing itself, little by little," among various interests and players. He said he believed Lithuania's leadership of the CD was playing an important role "because it lets us look at others' problems and think about ourselves." Western countries pushed Lithuania to make political and other reforms as conditions for entry into the EU and NATO, but that pressure stopped once membership was decided, he said. He said former Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok told him that not following through on demands for reform was Europe's "very biggest mistake. He told me, 'We pushed you to reform, to get in, but then we stopped'." Because of that, Pavilionis said, "In the last five years, we made it into the club, but we haven't looked critically at ourselves. We were stuck." But Grybauskaite is trying to change that. "She wants us to be a healthy Western society from the inside, not just looking good from the outside," Pavilionis said.

Reviving democracy promotion

¶3. (C) American support for the CD has helped Lithuania's efforts to reinvigorate the organization, Pavilionis said. "The general feeling was that something was going wrong with democracy in this neighborhood. Russia from 2000, it's obvious, has been going deeply into an autocratic state. Historically, that usually ends badly for the Baltic states." He also said there had been little or no encouraging democratic movement in former Soviet republics such as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan. "Mainstream Europe looked critically at this Community of Democracies. In Europe, to talk about democracy promotion is

not very popular. But this American administration has put democracy and rights back in front and said it shouldn't be taken for granted or forgotten." He said, "This gives the Lithuanian elites a chance to be part of the debate. After just a half a year of our (CD) presidency, democracy promotion is again something important to us."

¶4. (C) He said Lithuania had spoken with several CD members about taking the lead on various topics the organization addresses. Hungary is leading the drive to create an International Center for Democratic Transition, he said, and Canada also has put forth many ideas on strengthening civil society. Italy and Chile will have the lead role on exploring political risks of economic crisis. South Korea and Romania will lead on regional cooperation. Pavilionis said he hoped South Africa and the Netherlands would lead on education for democracy. As reported reftel, Pavilionis asked that the USG take the lead within the CD on gender equality and other issues related to women and democracy.

USG Visitors Wanted

¶5. (C) Pavilionis said he hoped to attract numerous Members of Congress to Vilnius for the 20th anniversary on March 11 of Lithuania's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. He said about 150 legislators from the United States and various European countries would be invited for the celebrations, and that he hoped a strong bipartisan delegation from Congress would accept.

¶6. (C) He said Lithuania also wanted to encourage a visit

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to the Baltics by either President Obama or Vice President Biden. "You have the same dilemma we have: whether to go to Moscow to celebrate various events, in this case the 65th anniversary" in 2010 of the end of World War II in Europe, he said. "There should be a stop in Lithuania for whoever is going to Moscow for the 65th anniversary." Pavilionis said Antony J. Blinken, the Vice President's National Security Advisor, had told him that the Vice President would be willing to visit the Baltics, whether in conjunction with a Moscow trip or not.

Courting Grybauskaite

¶7. (C) Pavilionis said high-level attention also could be important in building a relationship with President Grybauskaite. The President, he said, is not anti-American, but "is very much European. She wants us to make a Scandinavian-style, vibrant, technologically open society -- European in the best sense. That is compatible with a strong transatlantic relationship." He said the United States might have to work to woo Grybauskaite, but the task was not impossible. "She is independent and has a strong personality." For Grybauskaite's expected trip to Washington in March, "she needs a meeting with President Obama," Pavilionis said. The Ambassador told him that the Embassy supported that idea and was working hard for such a meeting. Pavilionis also said that Grybauskaite's foreign-affairs advisor, Darius Semaska, could be a key ally in courting Grybauskaite. "He is very much a transatlantic figure. He's your good partner." Pavilionis said Grybauskaite is decidedly not pro-Russia, but that Russia would work from both the left and right sides of the political spectrum to try to drive a wedge between Grybauskaite and the United States. "We will have lots of attempts from various angles to break that link," he said.

¶8. (C) Pavilionis said he expected changes early in the New Year in Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius' Cabinet. "The temperature is getting higher in Lithuanian internal politics. (Seimas Speaker Irena) Degutiene said she expected changes at the government level, with ministers.

She reflects the temperature within her party. The Conservatives are unhappy with their falling popularity." (Note: The Conservatives lead the four-party governing coalition. After a non-coalition faction gave its support to the 2010 budget bill earlier this month, Kubilius and others said there would be discussions about changes in the coalition and the possibility of that faction naming a minister. End note.)

¶9. (C) Foreign Minister Usackas may be on his way out, Pavilionis said. "There is a growing incompatibility (between Grybauskaite and Usackas). It's not because of their teams, but because of personality issues between the President and the Foreign Minister. I think they'll only continue to grow, and not to the advantage of my Foreign Minister." (As recently as December 28, Grybauskaite publicly rebuked Usackas for his comments on the report of the parliamentary committee that investigated an alleged CIA prison in Lithuania; Usackas' comments seemingly contradicted Grybauskaite's assertion that the Seimas report had vindicated her earlier suspicions about the prison's existence.) Pavilionis, who admitted that he is "lobbying hard" to become Lithuania's next ambassador in Washington, said he hoped Usackas' conflict with Grybauskaite would not damage his own chances. He added that Grybauskaite is interested in pushing him for a position on new EU President Herman Van Rompuy's staff. Pavilionis said that a successful CD presidency would be good for him as well as for Lithuania and for democracy.

Comment

¶10. (C) Pavilionis is an ambitious diplomat from a prominent Lithuanian family (his late father Rolandas was rector of Vilnius University and a European MP, while his mother Marija Ausriene Pavilioniene is a Social Democrat member of the Lithuanian parliament). He appears to be balancing himself, so far successfully, between Usackas and Grybauskaite. Though at one point he was believed to be seeking the foreign minister's job before it was given to Usackas, he by all accounts works well with the equally ambitious Usackas. Pavilionis is the driving force behind Lithuania's active chairmanship of the Community of Democracies, and in so doing is furthering one of Usackas' priorities. Embassy has always found Pavilionis well-disposed to the U.S., and we believe he would be an effective ambassador in Washington (all the more so given what appears to be a good relationship with Grybauskaite). He could prove a valuable contact in Brussels as well, should he end up working on Van Rompuy's staff.

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